

PUB-NO: EP000694492A2

DOCUMENT-IDENTIFIER: EP 694492 A2

TITLE: Apparatus and method for non-contact active tensioning
and steering of moving webs

PUBN-DATE: January 31, 1996

INVENTOR-INFORMATION:

NAME	COUNTRY
LONG, MICHAEL C O EASTMAN KODAK	US

ASSIGNEE-INFORMATION:

NAME	COUNTRY
EASTMAN KODAK CO	US

APPL-NO: EP95202030

APPL-DATE: July 22, 1995

PRIORITY-DATA: US28069394A (July 26, 1994)

INT-CL (IPC): B65H023/00

EUR-CL (EPC): B65H023/035 ; B65H023/04

ABSTRACT:

CHG DATE=19990617 STATUS=O> Apparatus and methods for tensioning and steering a moving web (11) in a conveyance machine without contact of the web to the machine by means of a pair of parallel air bars (19, 21) in a single moveable frame (35) which is adapted to pivot controllably about two intersecting orthogonal axes (29, 41) in a plane through the air bars. The tensioning and steering apparatus is preferably isolated in sensing and response from the rest of the conveyance machine by suction feed rollers (15, 17) upstream and downstream from apparatus of the invention. Separate feedback control systems monitor the tension and position of the web and adjust the orientation of the frame about each axis to adjust tension and lateral position of the web independently and continuously. Additional fixed air bars (31, 33) on opposite sides of the web in the web path between the moveable air bars provide high and unvarying web wrap angles on the moveable air bars to increase the tension and steering operating range and sensitivity. An additional moveable air bar (27) is provided downstream of the pair of moveable air bars and is adapted to pivot controllably about another axis (49) orthogonal to the direction of the tensioning and steering axes so that the axial direction (12, 47) of the moving web (11) can be changed. <MATH



Europäisches Patentamt
European Patent Office
Office européen des brevets



(11) EP 0 694 492 A2

(12) EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(43) Date of publication:
31.01.1996 Bulletin 1996/05

(51) Int. Cl.⁶: B65H 23/00

(21) Application number: 95202030.3

(22) Date of filing: 22.07.1995

(84) Designated Contracting States:
BE DE FR GB NL

(30) Priority: 26.07.1994 US 280693

(71) Applicant: EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY
Rochester, New York 14650-2201 (US)

(72) Inventor: Long, Michael,
c/o Eastman Kodak Company
Rochester, New York 14650-2201 (US)

(74) Representative: Phillips, Margaret Dawn et al
Harrow, Middlesex HA1 4TY (GB)

(54) Apparatus and method for non-contact active tensioning and steering of moving webs

(57) Apparatus and methods for tensioning and steering a moving web (11) in a conveyance machine without contact of the web to the machine by means of a pair of parallel air bars (19, 21) in a single moveable frame (35) which is adapted to pivot controllably about two intersecting orthogonal axes (29, 41) in a plane through the air bars. The tensioning and steering apparatus is preferably isolated in sensing and response from the rest of the conveyance machine by suction feed rollers (15, 17) upstream and downstream from apparatus of the invention. Separate feedback control systems monitor the tension and position of the web and adjust the orientation of the frame about each axis to adjust ten-

sion and lateral position of the web independently and continuously. Additional fixed air bars (31, 33) on opposite sides of the web in the web path between the moveable air bars provide high and unvarying web wrap angles on the moveable air bars to increase the tension and steering operating range and sensitivity. An additional moveable air bar (27) is provided downstream of the pair of moveable air bars and is adapted to pivot controllably about another axis (49) orthogonal to the direction of the tensioning and steering axes so that the axial direction (12, 47) of the moving web (11) can be changed.

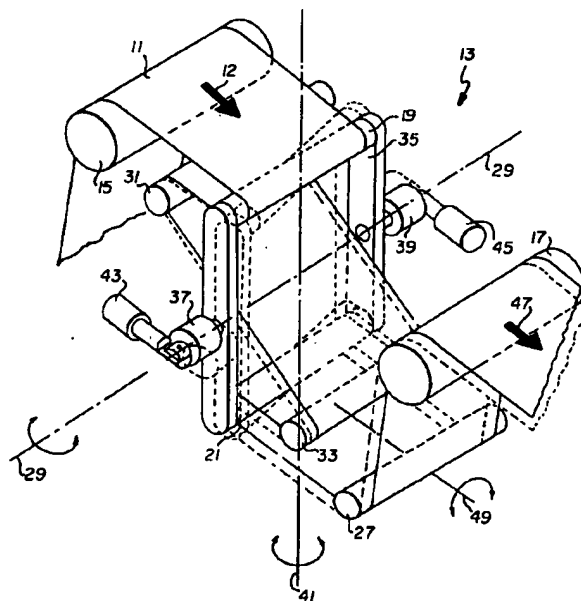


FIG. 4

EP 0 694 492 A2

Description

The invention concerns apparatus and methods for conveying moving webs, more particularly for tensioning and for steering such webs, and most particularly for simultaneously tensioning, steering, and redirecting moving webs without contact with such webs.

Machines which convey webs typically include a number of sequential process sections, for example, a photographic film or paper coating machine may have several coating sections, setting sections, and drying sections operative upon one or both sides of a web during a single pass of a web through the machine. Typically, each process section has its own web tension regime and benefits from being isolated in tension from the sections immediately preceding and succeeding it.

In order for a web to move smoothly through such a machine, and to unwind into and wind out of the machine, the web must be under tension at all times. However, many of the conveyance elements in a machine, especially rollers, exert inertial drag on a web, and after passage over many rollers a web will exhibit a loss in tension. Therefore, drive rollers which are responsive to tension sensors are included at intervals through the machine to change or restore tension to a selected level. Thus there may be a drive roller at the end of one section and/or another drive roller at the start of the next section.

Instabilities in web tension between these drive rollers require a dynamic means to variably lengthen or shorten the web path. Such means and its action between tension-restoring machine elements is referred to herein as "tensioning." Typically, this is provided by a device in the web path consisting of two rollers mounted parallel to each other on a common frame, with the a first side of the web facing one roller and the second side of the web facing the other roller. The frame pivots about an axis parallel to and midway between the rollers and transverse to the direction of web advance in order to accumulate or pay out web as needed. A torsion device acting about the axis applies a couple to the frame, which tensions the web variably in response to a web tension sensing device. US-A-2 685 417, US-A-2 714 268 and US-A-4 496 113 all show web tensioning devices comprising two parallel rollers rotatable about an axis that is between and parallel to the roller axes for absorbing and releasing web material to control tension.

In the conveyance of a web, there also exists a need to position the web controllably in the cross-web direction, sometimes repetitively, through a machine. Without such control, a web will wander laterally in a machine due to the cumulative effect of minute misalignments of conveyance components and variations in the straightness and planarity of the web itself. Alternately, succeeding sections of the machine may not be co-linear, through design or error. The lateral positioning of a moving web in a web conveyance machine is herein referred to as "steering."

Steering is typically accomplished by pivoting a frame carrying rollers, similar to the tensioning apparatus

just described, about an axis in the plane and direction of the incoming web and tangential to the first roller in the frame. Such as device is disclosed in US-A-4 069 959. Pivoting this frame displaces the outgoing web laterally, but introduces, and in fact requires, a twist in both the incoming and outgoing webs. The device serves as a steering device for a web when coupled to a downstream web lateral position sensor and an appropriate actuator and feedback system.

Twist in the incoming and outgoing webs in the machine may be undesirable. One approach in dealing with twist has been to isolate twist from the main web conveyance by leading the web past a high-wrap fixed roller, around a pair of parallel air conveyance elements commonly known as "air bars" which are mounted in a frame pivotable about an axis orthogonal to the axis of the first air bar, and past a second high-wrap fixed roller. Such a device is available from The Kohler Coating Machinery Corp., Greentown, Ohio, USA.

All of these prior tension isolation and steering devices suffer from loss of web traction at high web speeds due to entrainment of a thin layer of air between the rollers and the web. The loss of web traction results in a reduction in steering control and is especially troublesome for webs having low-friction coatings. Prior art devices require separate apparatus for tensioning and for steering, leading to large, space-consuming, expensive installations. Prior art devices also require very precise alignment between the rollers in the tensioning and steering frames, as well as between the frames and adjacent upstream or downstream rollers, to avoid creasing, scratching, or scuffing of webs and especially very thin webs. Such alignment is difficult and expensive to provide, for example, in applications in which rapid change-over or maintenance is required between product runs. Failure to provide such alignment in prior art conveyance machines can result in damaged or defective product, increased manufacturing cost, and decreased customer satisfaction.

It is a principal object of the invention to provide apparatus and method for tensioning and steering of a web without contact of the apparatus with the web.

It is a further object of the invention to provide apparatus and method for simultaneous tensioning and steering of a web without contact of the apparatus with the web by means of a pair of air bars in a single frame which can be pivoted about two orthogonal axes.

It is a still further object of the invention to provide apparatus and method for simultaneous tensioning, steering, and redirecting of a web without contact of the apparatus with the web.

It is a still further object of the invention to provide apparatus and method for highly controlled tensioning, steering, and redirecting of a web which does not require high precision in alignment of conveyance elements.

In accordance with one aspect of the present invention, there is provided apparatus for conveying a web material having a first side and a second side, the apparatus comprising:-

- a) a machine frame along which the web material passes;
- b) a first pivotable air bar having a first substantially cylindrical surface and a first axis, and being pivotably disposed on the machine frame, the first side of the web material being wrapped at least partially along the first cylindrical surface through a first wrap angle;
- c) a second pivotable air bar having a second substantially cylindrical surface and a second axis, the second pivotable air bar being spaced apart from the first pivotable air bar and pivotably disposed on the machine frame, the second axis being parallel to the first axis, the second side of the web material being wrapped at least partially along the second cylindrical surface through a second wrap angle;
- d) means for pivoting the first and second pivotable air bars in fixed relative relationship about a third axis orthogonal to the first and second axes, the third axis being in or parallel to a plane through the first and second axes and substantially orthogonal to the first and second axes, to steer and/or tension the web material as it passes through the apparatus; and
- e) means for drawing the web material through the apparatus.

In accordance with a second aspect of the present invention, there is provided apparatus for conveying a web material having a first side and a second side, the apparatus comprising:-

- a) a machine frame along which the web material passes;
- b) a first air bar having a first substantially cylindrical surface and a first axis, the first side of the web material being wrapped at least partially along the surface of the first air bar through a first wrap angle;
- c) a second air bar having a second substantially cylindrical surface and a second axis, the second side of the web material being wrapped at least partially along the surface of the second air bar through a second wrap angle;
- d) a supporting frame disposed on the machine frame for supporting the first and second air bars in fixed relationship with the first and second axes spaced apart and substantially parallel;
- e) means for controllably pivoting the supporting frame about a third axis substantially parallel to or within a plane through the first and second axes and substantially orthogonal to the first and second axes to steer the web material through the apparatus;
- f) means for controllably pivoting the supporting frame about a fourth axis orthogonal to the third axis and substantially parallel to the first and second axes, the fourth axis intersecting the third axis between the first and second axes to provide tension in the web;
- g) first and second fixed air bars having substantially cylindrical surfaces positioned in the path of the web

material between the first and second air bars mounted on the machine frame on opposite sides respectively of the plane through the first and second axes, the second side of the web material being wrapped at least partially along the cylindrical surface of the first fixed air bar and the first side of the web material being wrapped at least partially along the cylindrical surface of the second fixed air bar to provide values of the first and second wrap angles on the first and second air bars respectively of between 30° and 210°; and

h) means for drawing the web material through the apparatus.

In accordance with a third aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method for steering and tensioning a web material in apparatus for conveying such a web material, the web material having a first side and a second side, a method comprising the steps of:-

- a) partially wrapping the web material along the surfaces of first and second spaced apart air bars having first and second axes respectively, the first side of the web material facing the surface of the first air bar and the second side of the web material facing the surface of the second air bar, the air bars being fixed in relation to one another with the first and second axes being parallel, the pair of air bars being adapted to be controllably rotated about a third axis substantially parallel to the first and second axes and simultaneously about a fourth axis orthogonal to the third axis and substantially parallel to or within a plane through the first and second axes;
- b) driving the web material through the apparatus;
- c) sensing the relative lateral position and the relative tension of the driven web material in the apparatus;
- d) controllably rotating the pair of air bars about the third axis to steer the driven web material to a new lateral position in response to the lateral position sensing; and
- e) controllably rotating the pair of air bars about the fourth axis to change the path length of the web material in response to the relative tension sensing.

In accordance with a fourth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method for steering and tensioning a web material in apparatus for conveying such a web material, wherein the web material moves over first and second adjacent air bars having first and second parallel axes respectively, and wherein the web material is wrapped in equal and opposite angles of at least 30° around the first and second air bars respectively, characterized in that the first and second air bars are simultaneously pivoted about a third axis orthogonal to the first and second axes and about a fourth axis parallel to and between the first and second axes and orthogonal to the third axis, all axes lying in a common plane.

The apparatus and methods of the invention are useful for providing controllably variable web tension and dynamic web guidance or steering within a web conveyance machine. Air conveyance bars are necessarily used in the moveable apparatus and methods of the invention to convey the web. Air bars do not contact the web, but rather the web rides on a cushion of low-velocity air emitted continuously by the air bar. Air bars allow another degree of freedom not possible with roller conveyors, that of helical movement of the web as it passes around the bar. A web moving helically around a roller must move laterally as well as forward, thereby scrubbing the web on the roller surface and causing scratches on the web. Roller conveyance must have no relative motion in any direction between the roller and the web, whereas motion of the web in any direction parallel to the surface of an air bar is permissible. It is this freedom which permits the apparatus and methods of the instant invention.

A pair of parallel, spaced apart air bars is provided, having first and second axes, respectively, and being generally transverse to the web path. The web engages the first air bar in a first axial direction and is wrapped through an angle of at least about 90 degrees along each air bar, but having opposite web surfaces facing the first and second air bars, respectively (known as an "S-wrap" web path). Preferably, the machine section comprising the invention has drive rollers at either end of the web path through the section. The drive rollers, typically known as "suction feed rollers," grip the web by means of vacuum provided internally and ported to the outer surface of the roller. The air bars remain with their axes parallel to each other at all times, but may be pivoted about a third axis between and parallel to the first and second air bar axes so that the web path is shortened or lengthened controllably to vary the tension in the web. Simultaneously, the air bars may also be pivoted about a fourth axis orthogonal to the third axis, so that the web is steered to the right or left of, but parallel to, its former path, that is, in the same axial direction. Preferably, the air bars are rigidly mounted in parallel on a sturdy frame, which frame is adapted to pivot simultaneously about the third and fourth axes as described.

Alternatively, two frames can be provided, one larger than and surrounding the other, the two frames being connected in gimbal relationship such that one frame provides the pivotal motion required for steering and the other provides the pivotal motion required for tensioning. Either of the larger or smaller frames can provide either function.

In fixed relationship to the conveyance machine may be provided two additional air bars, mounted so as to define a double "z-shaped" web path through the device, as will be described in greater detail with drawings hereinafter. The additional air bars are mounted in the web path between the pivotable air bars to increase the web wrap angle on each of the tensioning/steering air bars to a fixed, high value, in the range of about 30° to 210°, preferably about 180°.

In the web path following the second tensioning/steering air bar is an additional air bar, disposed to pivot at its center about a fifth axis tangent to the air bar at the entry point of the incoming web to the air bar and orthogonal to both the steering axis and the tensioning axis. Pivoting this additional air bar serves to redirect the web in a direction not parallel to the previous web path, that is, in a different axial direction, as might be required for entry of the web to the next process section.

The foregoing and other objects, features, and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the following more particular description of the preferred embodiments of the invention, as illustrated in the accompanying drawings in which:-

Figure 1 is a simplified schematic cross-section of an apparatus in accordance with the invention, showing the path of a web between two isolating suction feed rollers and around moveable air bar conveyance elements for tensioning, steering, and redirecting the web;

Figure 2 is a simplified schematic cross-section showing the web path of Figure 1 with two additional air bar conveyance elements which provide a constant wrap angle of approximately 180° on each of the tensioning/steering air bars;

Figure 3 is a simplified schematic cross-section of a preferred embodiment of the invention showing the web path of Figure 2 (omitting for simplicity the air cushions between the web and the air bars as shown in previous drawings) with addition of a frame to hold the two tensioning/steering air bars in proper relationship to each other, and rotational and linear actuators operable on the frame to tension and steer the web, respectively;

Figure 4 is an isometric view of the apparatus shown schematically in Figure 3, showing the steering action of the linear actuators on the frame in phantom lines;

Figure 5 is an isometric view of an alternate embodiment of the invention wherein two separate frames in gimbal relationship are provided for tensioning and steering, tensioning being provided by an inner frame and steering being provided by an outer frame; and

Figure 6 is an isometric view of another alternate embodiment of the invention similar to the embodiment of Figure 5, wherein steering is provided by an inner frame and tensioning is provided by an outer frame.

The following is a detailed description of the preferred embodiments of the invention, reference being made to the drawings in which the same reference numerals identify the same elements of structure in each of the several figures.

The basic web path according to the invention is shown in Figure 1. Web 11 is provided from a source (not shown) and passes along a conveyance machine frame

(also not shown). Web 11 enters a section 13 of the conveyance machine wherein the web is to be steered, tensioned, and redirected. Section 13 is tension-isolated from machine sections upstream and downstream by suction feed rollers 15 and 17, respectively. Web 11 passes in an S-wrap over first and second air bars 19 and 21 at substantially equal first and second wrap angles, respectively, a first side 23 of web 11 facing first air bar 19, and a second side 25 of web 11 facing second air bar 21. The surfaces of air bars 19 and 21 facing web sides 23 and 25 are substantially cylindrical in shape. Leaving second air bar 21, web 11 passes around third air bar 27 and exits section 13 over suction feed roller 17.

Air bars 19 and 21 are held in fixed spaced relationship from each other, with their respective longitudinal axes parallel and coplanar, and are disposed to pivot about a third axis 29 approximately midway between air bars 19 and 21 and in the plane containing their axes, which pivoting lengthens or shortens the length of the web path between suction feed rollers 15 and 17.

A web path improved over that shown in Figure 1 is shown in Figure 2. Air bars 31 and 33 are fixedly mounted on the machine and so disposed that fixed air bar 31 causes a wrap of about 180 degrees on pivotable air bar 19, and fixed air bar 33 causes an equal and opposite wrap on pivotable air bar 21. For any given rotation of air bars 19 and 21 about axis 29, the web path is shortened or lengthened twice as much in the web path of Figure 2 as with the web path shown in Figure 1. This increases the operating range of the device, as well as doubling its effect per degree of rotation.

In Figure 3, operating components are added to the schematic device of Figure 2. Frame 35 connects air bars 19 and 21 in fixed, parallel relationship and is disposed to pivot about third axis 29 by means of first torque motor 37 and second torque motor 39 (shown in Figure 4). Web tension is sensed by a sensor (not shown) which acts through feedback controls (also not shown) to energise motors 37 and 39 to pivot frame 35 in the appropriate direction. Motors 37 and 39 can be assisted by hydraulic actuators (not shown) operating on frame 35, to reduce the required size of motors and to improve the speed of response of the tensioning apparatus.

The invention as described thus far is an air bar version of a conventional roller-equipped tensioning frame apparatus. However, the use of air bars, as noted above, permits relative helical movement to occur between web 11 and air bars 19 and 21 respectively. Frame 35, therefore, may be equipped to cause air bars 19 and 21 to pivot about a fourth axis 41, which movement causes web 11 to move laterally (be steered) to its relative right or left as it travels between feed roll 15 and air bar 27. Linear actuators 43 and 45 are mounted on opposite sides of frame 35 and are pivotably connected at their opposite ends respectively to torque motors 37 and 39 and to the machine frame (not shown). These actuators operate equally and in parallel, and since they face in opposite directions their action serves to cause frame 35 to pivot about axis 41. The lateral position of the web

downstream of air bar 21 is sensed by a conventional web sensor (not shown) and its signal is fed back via a controller (not shown) to actuators 43 and 45. Thus, frame 35 may be adapted to pivot controllably and simultaneously about both axis 29 and axis 41, thereby both tensioning and steering web 11 simultaneously. The plane of the web between feed roller 15 and air bar 19, and between air bar 21 and third air bar 27, undergoes no twist, as would otherwise occur with prior art roller-equipped steering frames.

Figure 4 shows an isometric view of the preferred embodiment shown in cross-section in Figure 3. The steering action of linear actuators 43 and 45 on frame 35, and the resulting lateral displacement of web 11, is shown in phantom outline.

In the next process downstream of machine section 13, the web may require a second axial direction 47 which differs from first axial direction 12. The rotations previously described about axes 29 and 41 serve only to alter the length of the web path and/or to change its lateral position. Its direction leaving air bar 21, however, is strictly parallel to its direction entering air bar 19. To change the axial direction of the web, air bar 27 is adapted to pivot about a fifth axis 49 which is tangential to air bar 27 in the plane of the entering web and orthogonal to axis 41. The pivoting mechanism, comprising a conventional frame, actuator, position sensor, and feedback controls, is not shown. Pivoting air bar 27 does introduce a twist into web 11, but the twist is unimportant, since it is not a large twist associated with steering means, but instead is quite small, serving to accommodate alignment errors.

An alternative embodiment of the invention is shown in Figure 5. Instead of driving frame 35 to perform both the tensioning and steering motions, it may sometimes be desirable to separate the two. An inner frame is shown, like frame 35 in the previous embodiment, and the web path and operating axes are unchanged, but frame 35 is surrounded by an outer frame 51 through which the web passes. The inner and outer frames taken together constitute a gimbal for the web. Outer frame 51 is adapted with linear actuators to perform the steering function by causing inner frame 35 to pivot about only axis 41. Inner frame 35 is adapted with torque motors connecting it along axis 29 to outer frame 51 to perform the tensioning function by causing frame 35 to pivot about only axis 29 within frame 51.

Another alternative embodiment of the invention is shown in Figure 6. This embodiment resembles that shown in Figure 5, except that the steering and tensioning functions have been switched between the inner and outer frames. Again, the axes and the web path are unchanged from the preferred embodiment shown in Figure 4.

Claims

1. Apparatus (13) for conveying a web material (11) having a first side (23) and a second side (25), the apparatus comprising:-
 - a) a machine frame (35, 51) along which the web material (11) passes;
 - b) a first pivotable air bar (19) having a first substantially cylindrical surface and a first axis, and being pivotably disposed on the machine frame (35, 51), the first side (23) of the web material (11) being wrapped at least partially along the first cylindrical surface through a first wrap angle;
 - c) a second pivotable air bar (21) having a second substantially cylindrical surface and a second axis, the second pivotable air bar (21) being spaced apart from the first pivotable air bar (19) and pivotably disposed on the machine frame (35, 51), the second axis being parallel to the first axis, the second side (25) of the web material (11) being wrapped at least partially along the second cylindrical surface through a second wrap angle;
 - d) means for pivoting the first and second pivotable air bars (19, 21) in fixed relative relationship about a third axis (29) orthogonal to the first and second axes, the third axis (29) being in or parallel to a plane through the first and second axes and substantially orthogonal to the first and second axes, to steer and/or tension the web material (11) as it passes through the apparatus; and
 - e) means (15, 17) for drawing the web material (11) through the apparatus.
2. Apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the first and second pivotable air bars (19, 21) are further controllably adapted to pivot about a fourth axis (41) substantially parallel to the first and second axes to vary the tension of the web material (11) in the apparatus.
3. Apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a first fixed air bar (31) and a second fixed air bar (33) positioned in the path of the web material (11) between the first and second pivotable air bars (19, 21) on opposite sides respectively of the plane through the first and second axes, the second side (25) of the web material (11) being wrapped at least partially along the first fixed air bar (31) and the first side (23) of the web material (11) being wrapped at least partially along the second fixed air bar (33) to provide values of the first and second wrap angles on the first and second pivotable air bars (19, 21) respectively of between 30° and 210°.
4. Apparatus according to claim 3, wherein the first and second fixed air bars (31, 33) each have substantially cylindrical surfaces, the second side (25) of the web material (11) being wrapped at least partially along the cylindrical surface of the first fixed air bar (31) and the first side (23) of the web material (11) at least partially along the cylindrical surface of the second fixed air bar (33).
5. Apparatus according to any one of the preceding claims, further comprising:-
 - a) a third air bar (27) downstream of the second pivotable air bar (21), the third air bar (27) having a substantially cylindrical surface and being generally parallel to the first and second pivotable air bars (19, 21); and
 - b) means for pivoting the third air bar (27) about a fifth axis (49) orthogonal to the third axis (29) to change the axial direction of the web material (11).
6. Apparatus (13) for conveying a web material (11) having a first side (23) and a second side (25), the apparatus comprising:-
 - a) a machine frame (35, 51) along which the web material (11) passes;
 - b) a first air bar (19) having a first substantially cylindrical surface and a first axis, the first side (23) of the web material (11) being wrapped at least partially along the surface of the first air bar (19) through a first wrap angle;
 - c) a second air bar (21) having a second Substantially cylindrical surface and a second axis, the second side (25) of the web material (11) being wrapped at least partially along the surface of the second air bar (21) through a second wrap angle;
 - d) a supporting frame disposed on the machine frame (35, 51) for supporting the first and second air bars (19, 21) in fixed relationship with the first and second axes spaced apart and substantially parallel;
 - e) means for controllably pivoting the supporting frame about a third axis (29) substantially parallel to or within a plane through the first and second axes and Substantially orthogonal to the first and second axes to steer the web material (11) through the apparatus;
 - f) means for controllably pivoting the supporting frame about a fourth axis (41) orthogonal to the third axis (29) and Substantially parallel to the first and second axes, the fourth axis (41) intersecting the third axis (29) between the first and second axes to provide tension in the web;
 - g) first and second fixed air bars (31, 33) having Substantially cylindrical surfaces positioned in the path of the web material (11) between the first and second air bars (19, 21) mounted on the machine frame (35, 51) on opposite sides

respectively of the plane through the first and second axes, the second side (25) of the web material (11) being wrapped at least partially along the cylindrical surface of the first fixed air bar (31) and the first side (23) of the web material (11) being wrapped at least partially along the cylindrical surface of the second fixed air bar (33) to provide values of the first and second wrap angles on the first and second air bars (19, 21) respectively of between 30° and 210°; and h) means (15, 17) for drawing the web material (11) through the apparatus.

orthogonal to the first and second axes and about a fourth axis (41) parallel to and between the first and second axes and orthogonal to the third axis (29), all axes lying in a common plane.

7. A method for steering and tensioning a web material (11) in apparatus (13) for conveying such a web material (11), the web material (11) having a first side (23) and a second side (25), a method comprising the steps of:-

a) partially wrapping the web material (11) along the surfaces of first and second spaced apart air bars (19, 21) having first and second axes respectively, the first side (23) of the web material (11) facing the surface of the first air bar (19) and the second side (25) of the web material (11) facing the surface of the second air bar (21), the air bars (19, 21) being fixed in relation to one another with the first and second axes being parallel, the pair of air bars (19, 21) being adapted to be controllably rotated about a third axis (29) substantially parallel to the first and second axes and simultaneously about a fourth axis (41) orthogonal to the third axis (29) and substantially parallel to or within a plane through the first and second axes;

b) driving the web material (11) through the apparatus;

c) sensing the relative lateral position and the relative tension of the driven web material (11) in the apparatus;

d) controllably rotating the pair of air bars (19, 21) about the third axis (29) to steer the driven web material (11) to a new lateral position in response to the lateral position sensing; and

e) controllably rotating the pair of air bars (19, 21) about the fourth axis (41) to change the path length of the web material (11) in response to the relative tension sensing.

8. A method for steering and tensioning a web material (11) in apparatus (13) for conveying such a web material (11), wherein the web material (11) moves over first and second adjacent air bars (19, 21) having first and second parallel axes respectively, and wherein the web material (11) is wrapped in equal and opposite angles of at least 30° around the first and second air bars (19, 21) respectively, characterized in that the first and second air bars (19, 21) are simultaneously pivoted about a third axis (29)

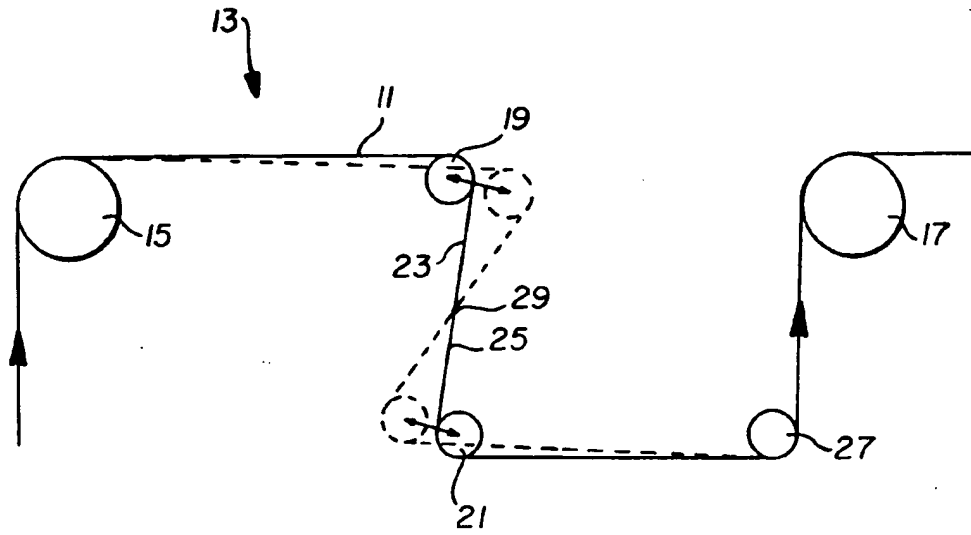


FIG. 1

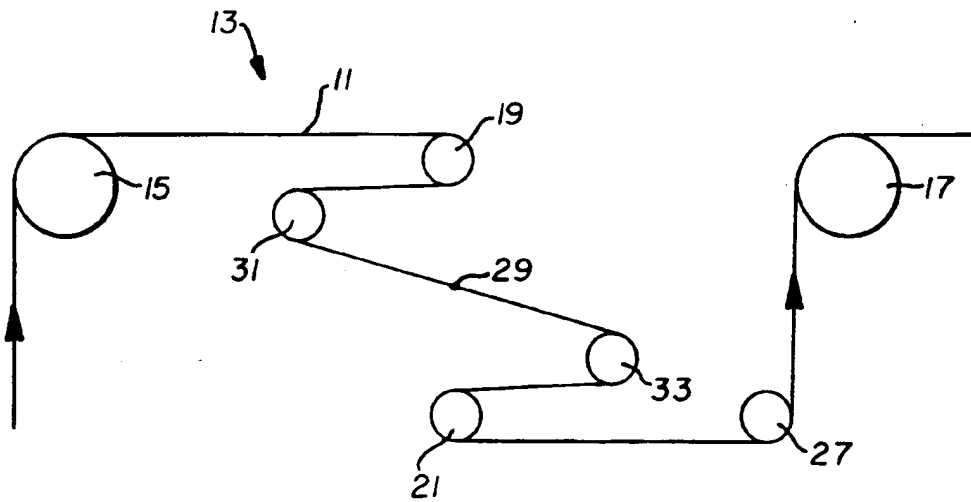


FIG. 2

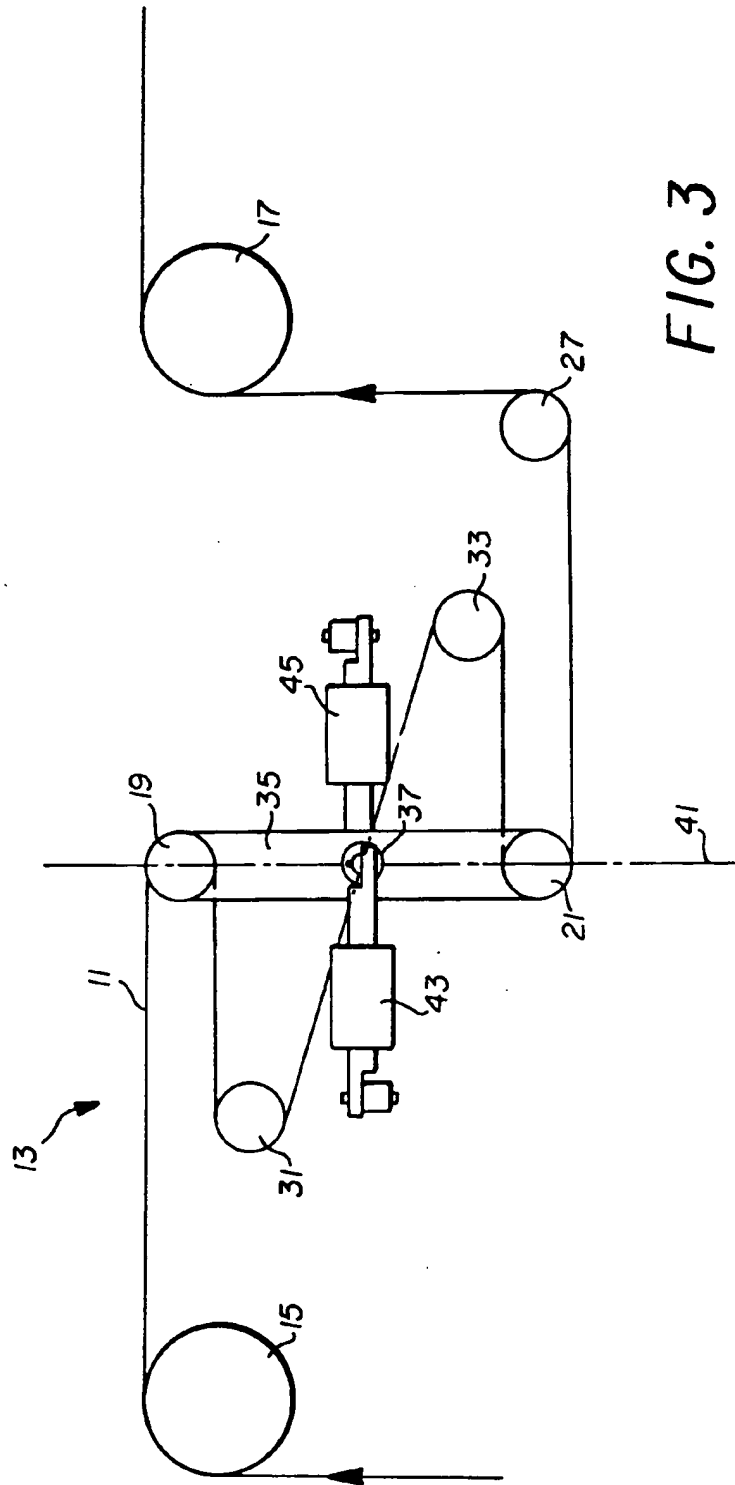


FIG. 3

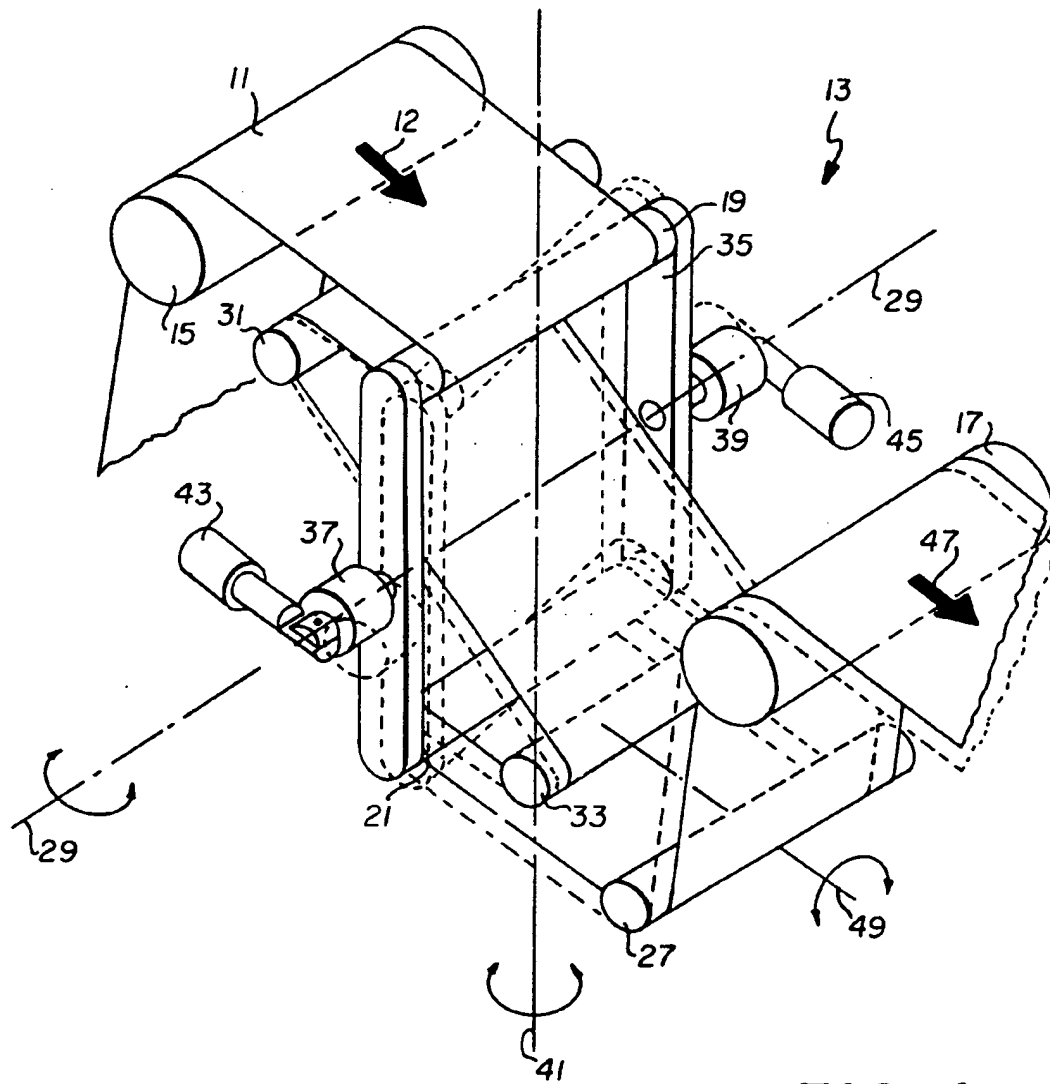


FIG. 4

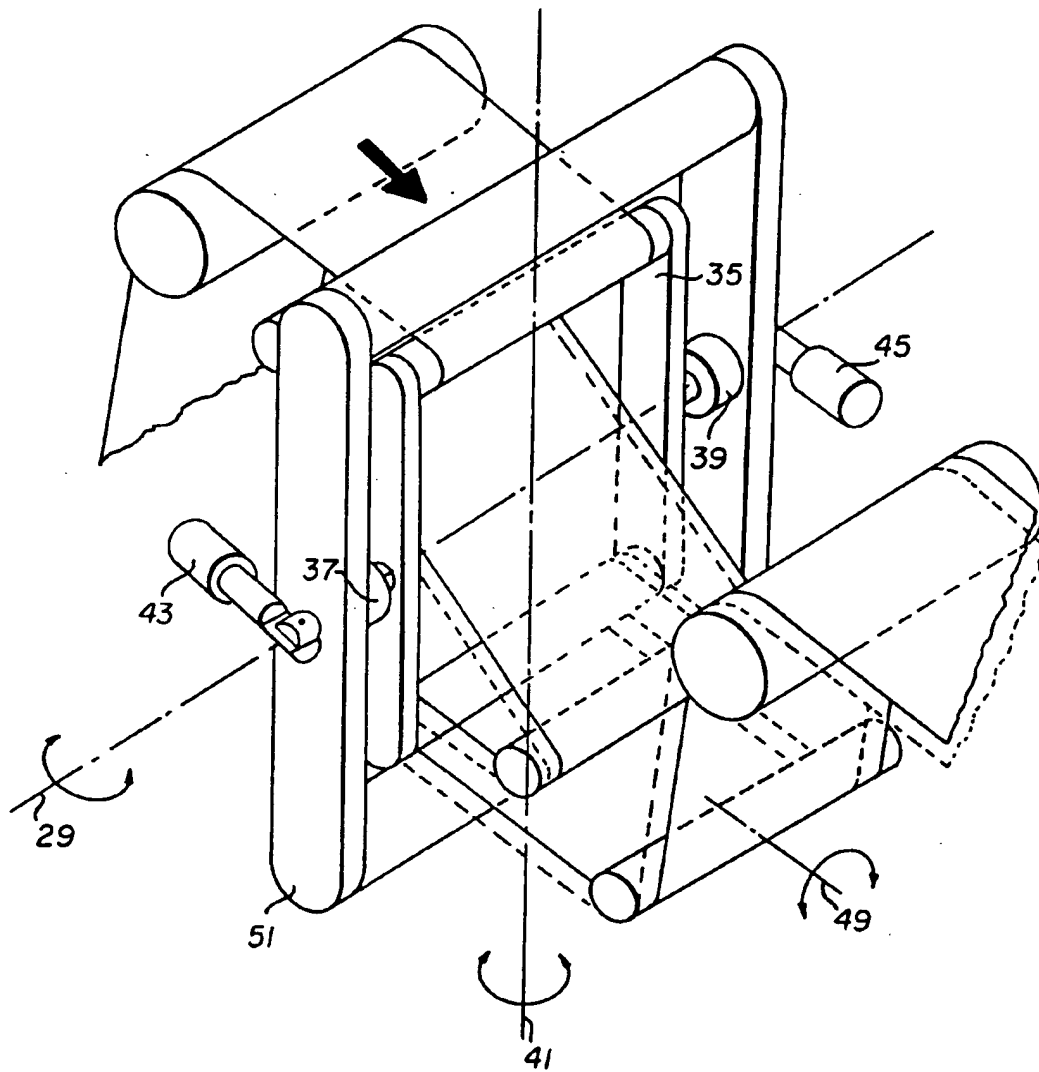


FIG. 5

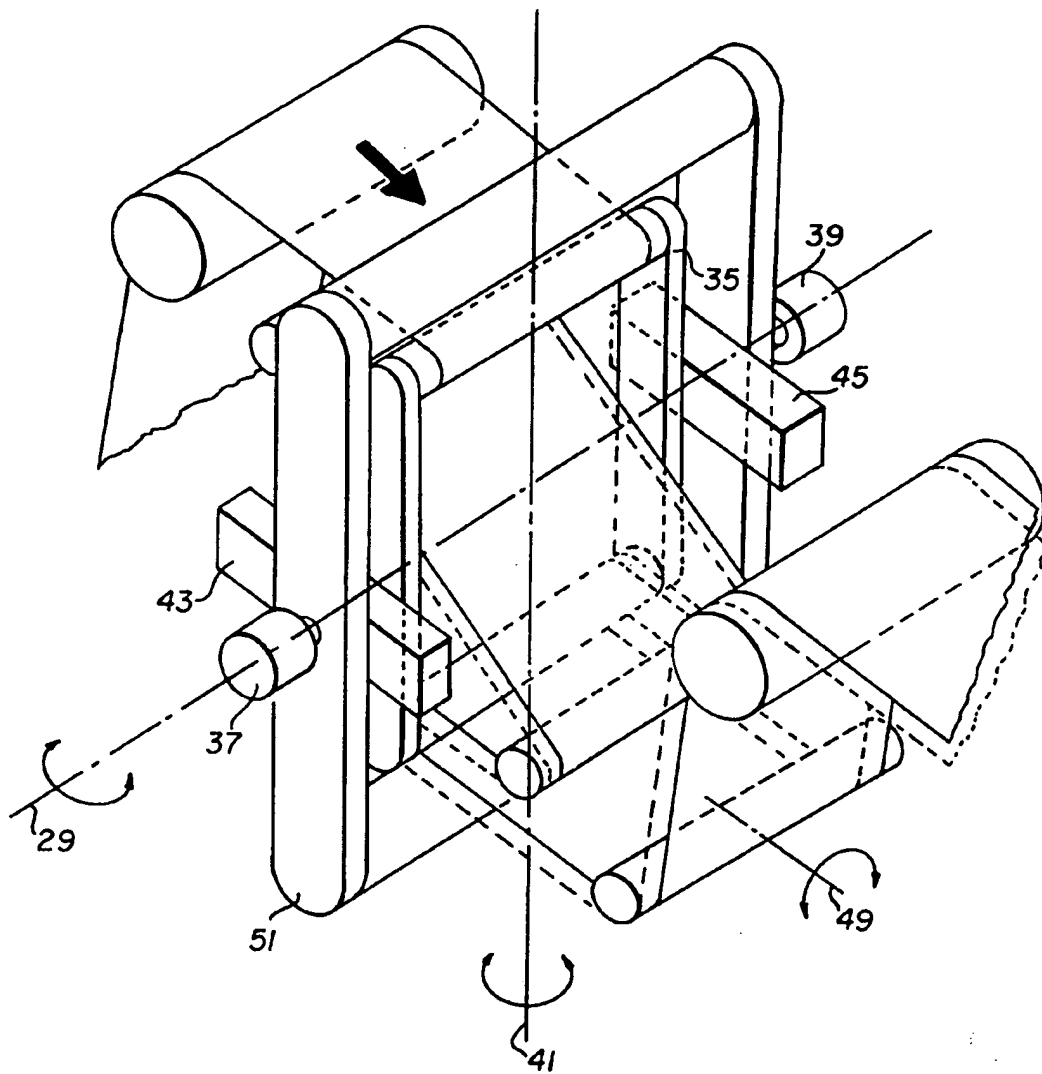


FIG. 6